

## Performance and Administration Cabinet Committee

Wednesday, 09 February 2022

7.30 pm

### Present:

Cllr Narinderjit Singh Thandi (Chair)  
Cllr Brian Francis (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Harold Craske  
Dakota Dibben  
Sarah Gow  
Gary Harding  
Leslie Hills  
Samir Jassal  
Brian Sangha  
Gurbax Singh

Darren Everden Assistant Director (Corporate Services)  
Simon Hookway Assistant Director (Communities)  
James Larkin Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services  
Pat Knight Head of Revenue & Benefits  
Ben Clarke Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

### 21. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Elizabeth Mulheran; Cllr Brian Sangha attended as her substitute. An apology of absence was also received from the Director (Corporate Services).

### 22. To sign the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 22 November 2022 were signed by the Chair.

### 23. To declare any interest Members may have in the items contained on this agenda. When declaring an interest Members should state what their interest is.

No declarations of interest were made.

### 24. Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service Objectives

Members were provided with details of the updated objectives linked to the continuing shared service arrangements with Medway Council.

The Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services highlighted key points from the report regarding the service objectives of the Shared Service and what factors contributed to the delivery of an effective counter fraud function; the proposal was to remove three of the five original service objectives.

Objectives three to five were not felt to be an effective measure of continuing performance in relation to the shared working arrangements and it was therefore suggested that those objectives were removed. Objectives one and two would remain as the key measures of the effectiveness of the shared working arrangements.

The performance of the revised objectives would be assessed as part of the annual review of the Shared Service and the findings would be reported to the Performance & Administration Committee in September 2022.

Member commented on the success of Counter Fraud as a Shared Service over the last few years.

Members approved the amended objectives for the shared service arrangement.

## **25. Council Tax Reduction Scheme**

Members were updated on the progress made on the review of the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme as well as the outcome of the Equality Impact Assessment.

The Head of Revenues & Benefits outlined key points concerning the consultation for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme:

- It ran for a nine-week period from 22 October 2021 to 24 December 2021; the Service wrote to 6477 claimants together with 5000 randomly sampled non-claimant residents
- 537 responses were received which was a very good response rate considering the length of the document and the previous consultation in 2017 which received only 387 responses. The current consultation saw a 39% increase. The rate also compared favourably to other local authorities; Ashford Borough Council received 88 responses and Dartford Borough Council only received 35 responses
- The high number of responses received allowed for a high degree of confidence that a balanced view had been received; of the responses received, 99.4% lived in Gravesham, over 79% were in receipt of Council Tax Reduction, over 33% or their partners were working in self employment and 88.3% were liable to pay Council Tax. Improvements were also made on responses received from ethnic groups
- The full list of consultation results could be found at appendix five, but the main result was that 41.7% wished to retain the current CTRS however that figure changed significantly once they considered the scheme under question four which then saw a 57.2% agreement for the new scheme
- All nine proposed changes received agreement ranging from over 57% to 82.8%
- The Equality Impact Assessment was attached at appendix four; the Service recognised that there would be risk to some claimants and in order to mitigate the risk support funds would be utilised. The Service would work to identify those cases that would be adversely affected to the proposed changes to the CTRS using the Low Income Family Tracker

In response to Members questions, the Head of Revenue & Benefits advised that:

- 31 third sector organisations were invited to the virtual meeting for consultation but only one organisation attended; however, ten organisations did respond to the consultation overall

- Feedback on table 1 on page 19 of the report was that it was a very helpful grid scheme which made the complex subject a bit easier to understand
- The Service developed the consultation with the assistance of a consultant who had worked with a number of other local authorities on their consultations; the Assistant Revenue & Benefits Manager and team undertook a significant amount of work continually recalculating and tweaking the Scheme to ensure it kept the number of adversely affected claimants to a minimum
- Working with the Comms Team during the consultation was paramount to receiving the positive response rate as their online campaigns and videos allowed greater audiences to be reached. Writing to all claimants on the current CTRS and to 5000 non-claimants that could become claimants in the future also attributed to the higher-than-normal response rate. Excellent support was also received from Customer Services during the consultation. The Head of Revenues & Benefits was happy to advise other managers on how the consultation was created, led and advertised to assist in receiving higher responses in other services consultations
- The non-claimants contacted were chosen through a random number generator in the system with the first 5000 being selected
- The Service used the Low Income Family Tracker to identify cases where they were already in financial crisis or would move into financial crisis due to the proposed changes. Detailed modelling had been undertaken and those residents that would be adversely affected were now known to the team; they would be contacted and directed to the Hardship Fund

Members commented their general approval of the Scheme and were happy that their previous concerns had been addressed through thorough consultation and officers had included many of their points in the final report.

Members noted the detailed results of the public consultation process on the proposed Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2022-2023 together with the equality impact Assessment.

## **26. Surveillance Camera Policy**

The Committee was consulted on a draft Surveillance Camera Local Authority Code of Practice for the Council which was attached at appendix two.

The Assistant Director (Communities) advised that each council service operating a surveillance camera system was responsible for having policies and procedures for their use, completing Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) and reviewing the use of cameras regularly, especially when changes had taken place. In those circumstances, the Surveillance Camera Commissioner advised that a Local Authority's Code of Practice (LA Code) was also put in place to demonstrate that it was meeting its legal obligations and adherence to the Surveillance Camera Commissioner's Code of Practice and its 12 principles.

The Assistant Director (Communities) highlighted further key points from the report regarding the responsibilities of officers and the guidance from the commissioner; Members were advised that the Policy had been taken through the Information Governance Group and is likely to be reported to Cabinet for agreement sometime in the future.

The Assistant Director (Communities) concluded that, once the Local Authority Code of Practice is in place, third-party accreditation would also be sought through the Surveillance Camera Commissioner.

Members had their questions answered by the Assistant Director (Communities):

- The wording of 5.3.3 would be amended to drop the mention of operational staff being fully developed. The wording was intended to ensure the Strategic Responsible Officers were up to date with requirements and were fully trained in the processes for the camera systems. An assessment pack was being created for each scheme operated by the council. These would include a record of training and help staff understanding of the processes and their responsibilities
- The Assistant Director (Communities) noted Member concern over the wording around 4.9.1 of 'deterring and detecting crime'. It was suggested by a Member that the wording be amended to advise that the purpose of the CCTV system in the first instance was to promote community safety and public assurance and then promote the camera's effects in detecting and deterring crime/anti-social behaviour. The addition of the wording would make the report a more public facing document. The Assistant Director (Communities) agreed that it was important to differentiate between the different purposes of the scheme; some were investigatory, and others were to protect the Community

Members welcomed the cameras for their crime prevention ability, but concerns were raised that having too many cameras would infringe on the public's privacy and would lead to Gravesham becoming a 'big brother' Borough. Members sought assurance that a careful balance would be struck so that there would be enough cameras for public safety, but not too many that would infringe on the public's right to privacy.

In response to the concerns raised, the Assistant Director (Communities) explained that it was important that the Council communicated to the public the approach that was being taken with installation of cameras and the reasons for a camera being installed. The Council regularly received freedom of information (FOI) requests asking for further information on how many cameras were installed in Gravesham and the reasons for having them; for example, there are just over 50 public space cameras operational in the Borough which wasn't a huge number. All of the cameras were regularly reviewed in relation to incidents and could be removed if there was no longer a valid need for them to be in their current position. It would be beneficial to conduct a piece of work around communicating messages regarding CCTV cameras to the public.

The Assistant Director (Communities) explained that the Council had no powers over CCTV cameras installed on private property, but the Council were able to place mobile cameras in certain areas and they could be used to test out the usefulness of the position of the camera and if a permanent camera was needed. The Assistant Director (Communities) agreed to circulate the costs of installing and maintaining a CCTV camera to Members outside of the Committee.

The decision to install a CCTV camera was made by officers at the Council and a number of factors were considered during the process; when a request was received crime incidents were reviewed in the area requested to assess whether a camera could be justified. A comprehensive review of the public space CCTV scheme was also carried out within the last two years. Consideration needs to be given to how the public are engaged with future reviews.

In response to a Member's question, the Assistant Director (Communities) advised that Members are appointed as a Lay Panel of Visitors to visit the control room where the Borough's public space CCTV cameras are monitored. Arrangements could be made for other Members to view the operation. The control room had certain protocols in place around monitoring, which exclude following random members of the public; such monitoring only takes place when individuals of interest have been identified, for example when given intelligence from the Police.

Following a short debate by Members on privacy vs safety with regards to CCTV cameras, Cllr Sangha explained an example to the Committee to alleviate certain concerns over too many cameras. Cllr Sangha had requested a CCTV camera be placed in Pelham ward to deter low level drug dealers and he advised that it was a very comprehensive process which required local residents to be engaged with before a camera could even be considered. In the end a mobile camera was placed and after 6 months it was evaluated and removed as it had severed its purpose by deterring low level drug incidents completely.

Members noted the draft Code of Practice.

### **Close of meeting**

The meeting ended at 20:17pm.